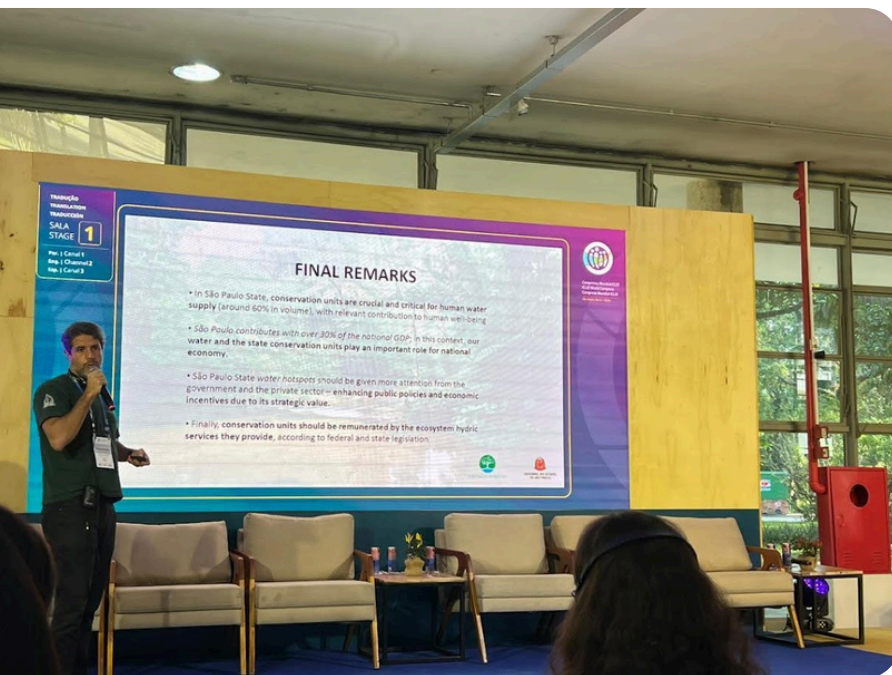


ICLEI World Congress 2024: Thematic Session

Protecting our communities with resilient urban water systems

Event Report | 19 June 2024

Cities are typically treated as islands in relation to the catchments which supply them with water and into which they release effluent water. In reality, they form nodes in a complex network where actions by water users in one part of a catchment impact other communities and ecosystems. The pressures of continued urban development and a changing climate have led to impacts such as floods and droughts impacting all aspects of urban systems, causing disruption to transport networks, energy supply, equitable access to water, food provision, industrial output, tourism, ecosystem functioning and human health.



Globally, evidence shows that these impacts lead to increased inequality in society, with vulnerable or marginalized groups (such as women, youth, indigenous communities, the homeless and others) bearing the brunt and lacking the capacity to increase their resilience. These impacts are universal in scope, with urban areas in the global north as well as the global south, affected, and likewise the inspirational solutions to tackling these impacts emerge from all regions of the world.

This session was convened through the ICLEI Global Programme on Urban Water Resilience and aimed to explore the challenges faced by cities in this regard as well as offering lessons learned and examples of successful interventions. Representatives of cities dealing with urban water resilience challenges were brought together in a discussion with Congress participants on what an integrated approach to urban water resilience would look like (see programme below with list of speakers and their affiliations). Of particular interest is learning from cities and other local governments how they have become more engaged in catchment management, worked with nature to secure water storage and flood control, and improved the equitable and efficient supply of water to communities, while reducing losses and minimizing the impact of effluents on ecosystems.

Event programme

| Action | Lead |
|--|---|
| Introduction to the session and the ICLEI Global Water Resilience Program | Anton Earle ICLEI Global Coordinator of Water Systems |
| Ignite presentation on how São Paulo avoided "Day Zero" using catchment forest conservation | Rodrigo Levkovicz Executive Director, São Paulo State Forestry Foundation |
| Questions from the audience | Anton Earle ICLEI Global Coordinator of Water Systems |
| <i>Stories of inspiration on urban water resilience</i> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brett KenCairn, Senior Division Manager of Nature-based Solution, City of Boulder, Colorado, USA • Ruth Moncayo, Engineer, City of Ambato, Ecuador • Raveendran Kesavan, Town and Country Planning Department, Government of Pudecherry, India • Claudio Klenz, Specialist: Water Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Brazil | |
| Facilitated audience discussion | Anton Earle ICLEI Global Coordinator of Water Systems |
| Keynote Listener - reflections | Marília Israel Biodiversity and Resilience Advisor, ICLEI South America |



Highlights

The city representatives each shared a story of inspiration, drawing on their experience of a completed initiative, a work in progress, or a lesson learned from a project which did not go as planned. All of these provided valuable insights, with highlights being:



“In Sao Paulo through our water systems we can see the influence of the oceans and the rain, we can see the benefits of nature. This data is important as it informs evidence-based decision-making at city and state level”

~ *Rodrigo Levkovicz, Executive Director, São Paulo State Forestry Foundation, Brazil.*



“The Invisible Reservoir refers to the water in the system of water trapped across a catchment and held back for use later and we need to place a value on this water”

~ *Claudio Klemz, Specialist: Water Resources, The Nature Conservancy Brazil.*



“Traditional approaches to water management included the construction of cisterns linked in series which would capture rainwater, each filling sequentially and providing protection from floods and a reservoir of supply in the dry season. We have disrupted such traditional systems in modern urban planning and need to resuscitate them as we have done in Puducherry with benefits for the city as well as local communities”

~ *Raveendran Kesavan, Town and Country Planning Department, Government of Pudecherry.*



“We need to deprofessionalize aspects of water management and re-engage communities in taking over responsibility for local systems”

~ *Brett KenCairn, Senior Division Manager of Nature Based Solution, City of Boulder*



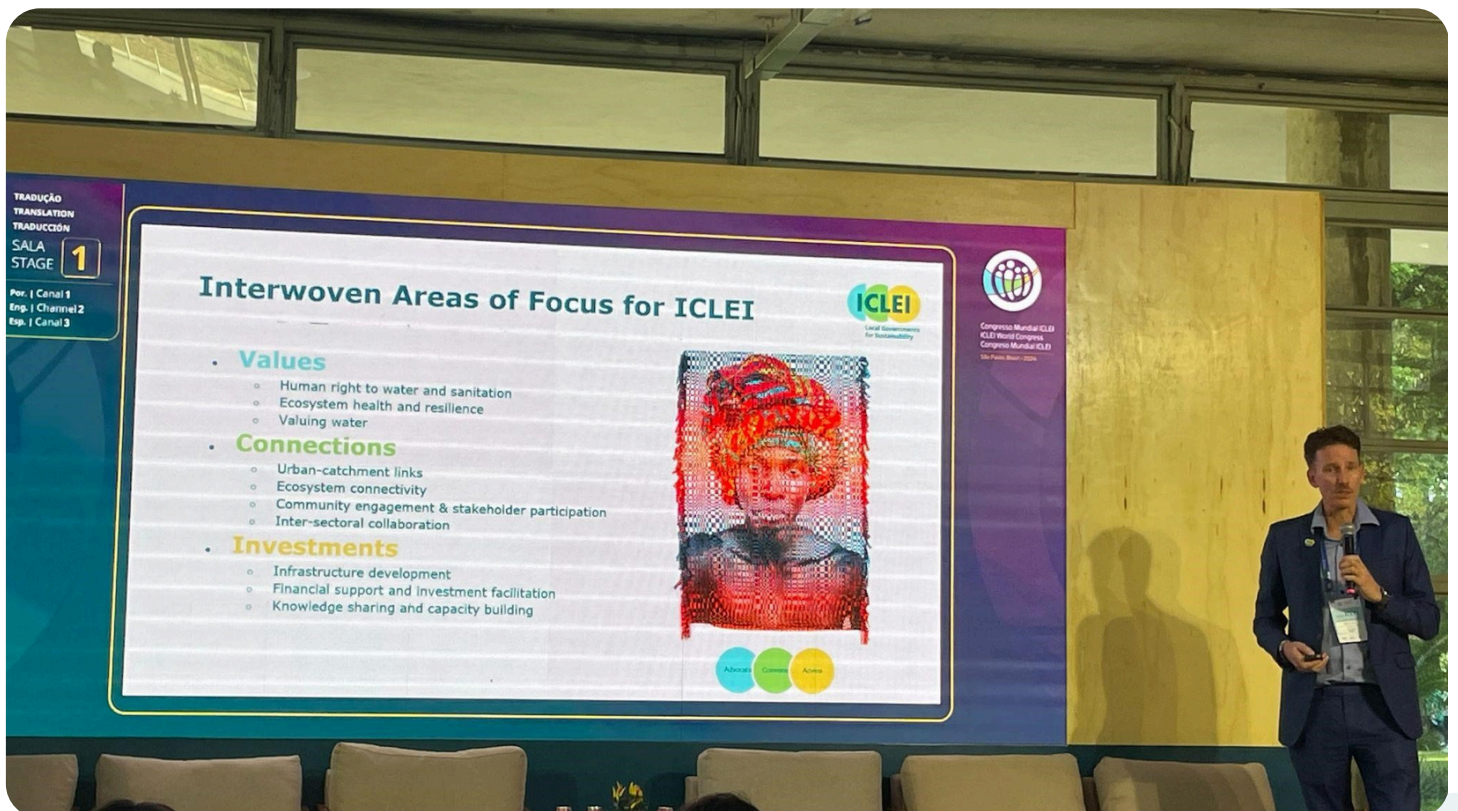
“Scientists use the future tense when speaking about the impacts of climate change - projected scenarios to hit us in a decade or two. City managers use the present tense and speak of climate impacts hitting their communities now, leading to either too little water, too much water, or water which is too dirty”

~ *Anton Earle, Global Coordinator: Water Systems, ICLEI*

Highlights

ICLEI's 2,600 members are at the forefront of responding to the impacts of climate change, with the hydrological cycle speeded up and leading to cycles of droughts and floods following each other in short succession. The only part of the hydrological cycle which we can control is from when a drop of rain, or other precipitation, hits the earth and makes its way across the landscape and eventually enters the ocean where it is again sequestered beyond our reach.

By establishing stronger connections with the catchments which supply them, cities can slow the progress of water across the landscape, increasing infiltration into the earth, replenishing aquifers and sustaining river flows. Working with nature to include the value of green infrastructure, such as wetlands, floodplains, and constructed infiltration zones, in their asset registers cities account for the benefits they accrue from a biodiverse natural environment and can ensure capital investments can be made to expand these benefits along with budgeting for their operation and maintenance costs. By promoting sustainable values, fostering connections, and facilitating strategic investments, ICLEI supports local authorities and cities in building resilient water systems that ensure equitable access to water, protects ecosystems, and enhances the overall quality of life for urban residents.



Key messages and next steps

As a response to a changed climate as well as other drivers of change such as rapid urban development and biodiversity loss, cities are taking action to ensure their water resilience.

Several of the speakers at the session had similar experiences to share, despite being in vastly different geographies. This opens a great opportunity for practitioners to learn from each other and build coalitions of like minded leaders who are willing to take bold steps at the local level. ICLEI will continue to play a role supporting innovation at city scale by providing technical support for policy formation, facilitating dialogue, building capacity, and linking to potential sources of finance.

ICLEI will convene a session at the World Water Week in Stockholm 25-29 August, 2024 and engage further with the global water policy community in order to form partnerships and secure opportunities for our members.

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